

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, VT
SUBJECT: POPE PAUL'S SPEECH AT CASTEL GANDOLFO AUGUST 15, 1977

1. POPE PAUL VI TRADITIONALLY CELEBRATES MASS ON AUGUST 15, FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION AND LOCAL HOLIDAY, IN THE CHAPEL AT CASTEL GANDOLFO FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE TOWN. DURING THE CEREMONY THIS YEAR, POPE PAUL SAID THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE PEOPLE TO CELEBRATE A SIMILAR MASS NEXT YEAR, "BUT WHO KNOWS IF I, OLD NOW AS I AM, CAN HOPE TO MARK THIS FEAST DAY WITH YOU AGAIN." HE WENT ON TO SAY, "IF GOD WISHES. BUT I SEE APPROACHING THE THRESHOLD OF THE BEYOND." POPE PAUL HAS REFERRED TO HIS DEATH IN THE PAST, MOST RECENTLY AT EASTER.

2. EMBASSY EMPLOYEE ATTENDING THE CEREMONY INDICATED THAT POPE PAUL LOOKED MORE RESTED THAN WHEN SHE SAW HIM AT THE GENERAL AUDIENCE ON JULY 6, BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FOR CASTEL GANDOLFO. HE SEEMED SLIGHTLY MORE SURE-FOOTED AND WAS TANNED.

3. BEFORE POPE PAUL LEFT FOR CASTEL GANDOLFO, IT WAS ANNOUNCED BY THE VATICAN THAT HE WOULD BE
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RETURNING TO ROME BY HELICOPTER TO GIVE THE GENERAL AUDIENCES EACH WEDNESDAY, WHICH HAS BEEN THE PRACTICE FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS. POPE PAUL HAS NOT RETURNED TO ROME FOR THE LAST THREE WEDNESDAYS, BUT HAS HELD A BRIEFER AUDIENCE AT CASTEL GANDOLFO. WHEN VATICAN OFFICIAL WAS QUESTIONED ABOUT THIS, HE INDICATED THAT THE POPE WAS NOT ILL

BUT "FATIGUED," AND THAT THE TRIP TO ROME BY HELICOPTER IS TIRING.

4. POPE PAUL HAS CALLED A WORLDWIDE MEETING OF BISHOPS FOR SEPTEMBER 30TH, WHICH IS ONLY 4 DAYS AFTER THE DATE OF HIS 80TH BIRTHDAY. SINCE IT WAS RECENTLY DECIDED THAT CARDINALS SHOULD RETIRE UPON REACHING THEIR 80TH BIRTHDAY, AND IN LIGHT OF THE CONFERENCE POPE PAUL HAS CALLED FOR SEPTEMBER 30TH, THERE HAS BEEN SOME SPECULATION AS TO WHETHER HE MIGHT ANNOUNCE HIS RETIREMENT ON HIS 80TH BIRTHDAY.

5. COMMENT: MOST OF THE ITALIAN PRESS INTERPRETED POPE PAUL'S SPEECH AT CASTEL GANDOLFO AS A FAREWELL SPEECH TO THE PEOPLE OF THAT TOWN. VATICAN EXPERTS FEEL, HOWEVER, THAT SINCE POPE PAUL HAS REFERRED TO HIS DEATH ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT HE BELIEVES "GOD WILL DECIDE ON THE TIMING OF THE END OF HIS MISSION," AND THAT HE WILL NOT RESIGN ON SEPTEMBER 26TH.HOLMES

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